

Jarmusch's Dead Man 27

David Buchan's Art 28

Killjoys 18

Taxi Chain 23

THE GUIDE TO THE ZEITGEIST

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Pulling the Plug on Hate Rock

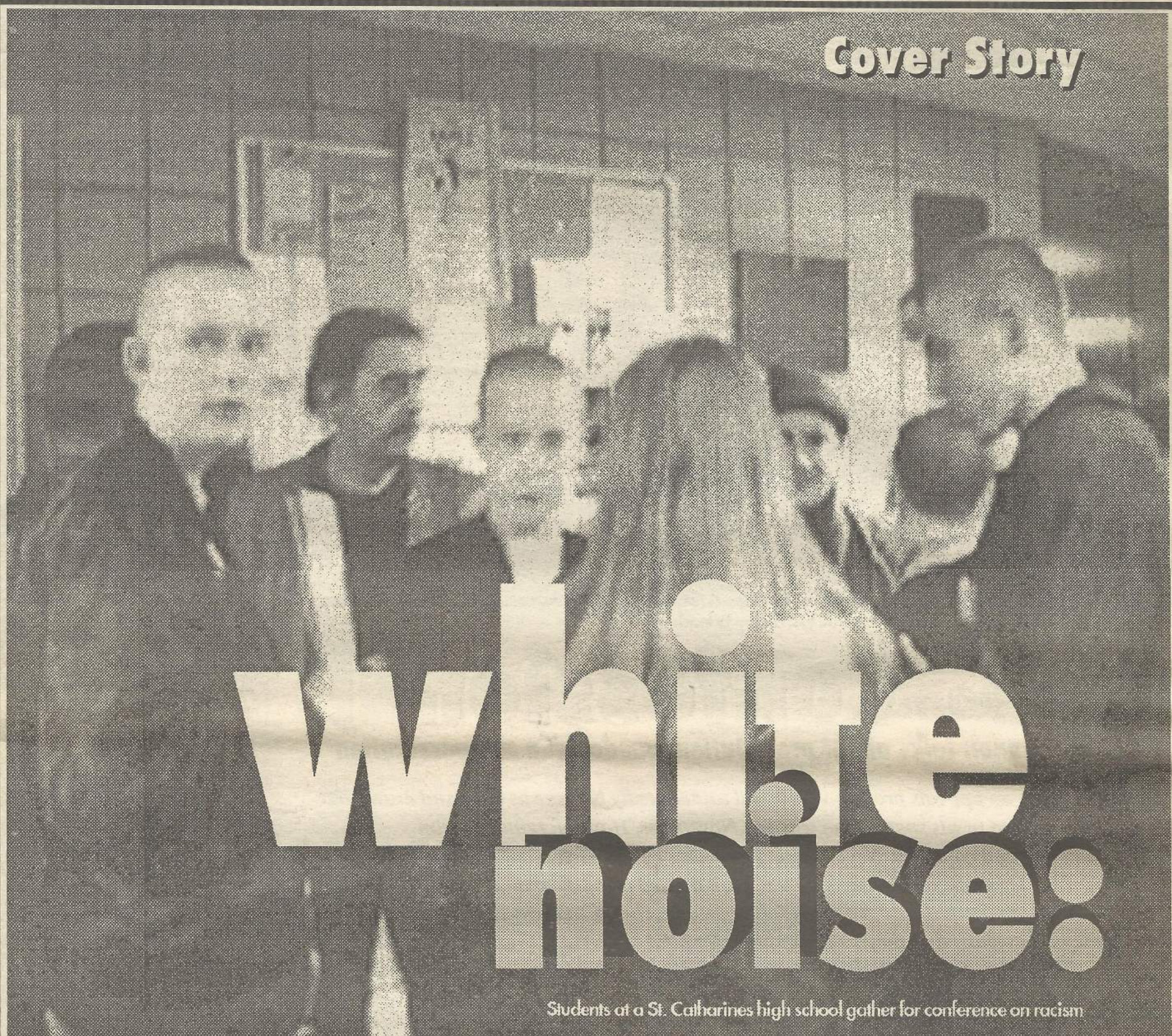
Page 10



EXCLUSIVE Prostitute Professor Speaks Out 9

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Students at a St. Catharines high school gather for conference on racism

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARA

musical hatemongers target the mainstream



An id investigation

by Jayson MacLean

An obscure American record company is trying to become the centre of a new cultural force in North America: the white power music scene. What Seattle was to grunge, the American border city of Detroit is to supremacist rock, a movement bent upon creating a place for itself within mainstream music culture.

Resistance Records, the nasty brainchild of Canada's own George Burdi, is part of a sophisticated plan to use an independent record label, a concert promotion business and a glossy full-colour magazine to put a modern, hip spin to white power ideology. Burdi and his partner Mark Wilson think they can peddle their racist views to a new generation of directionless and impressionable white youth.

And while the white power movement has suffered serious setbacks at the hands of anti-racist activists in urban areas like Toronto and Minneapolis-St. Paul, it is within the politically naive suburbs that organized racism is now trying to make its presence felt.

According to Steven Shulman of the Canadian Jewish Congress, "The new face of racism is going fishing for recruits and support in areas perhaps less aware of what's really going on behind their slick suit and tie approach."

In Durham Region and small communities like Lindsay, Niagara Falls and St. Catharines (the latter is reportedly the only area outside of Toronto to have a chapter of the "white rights" group, the Heritage Front), white power groups are trying to push hate through flyers and backroom discussions. At a St. Catharines high school, fascists turned up and were allowed to stay at a November 1995 "Community Dialogue on Racism," thus giving them the chance to inch closer towards legitimacy in the small town.

Burdi is part of a new generation of white power activists who have figured out that music is the best way to preach to the masses. With youth and music culture so intertwined in today's society - and arguably the most important influence on young people - racists have learned that controlling the music can lead to controlling their ideas. The music also serves as a "cool" veneer for the more unsavoury ideas, like genocide and white supremacy.

Ironically, a Detroit suburban community of mostly Jewish and Black families is the home for Resistance

Records Inc. A Toronto native, Burdi was attending the University of Guelph in 1990 when he was recruited by the Church of the Creator, an often violent Christian and white-supremacist group (now dissolved.) Burdi spent the next few years gaining racist contacts before he was convicted of a May 1993 assault on a young anti-racist woman in Ottawa. He served one month of a one year sentence before being released on bail. Reportedly



now living in Windsor, Burdi and his associate, Mark Wilson started Resistance in the spring of 1994 with the goal of promoting the hate messages of white power music. Their quick rise in prominence and power is suspected to have been aided by wealthy ideological sympathizers, i.e. rich racists.

Resistance Records' master plan involves using a contrived sense of trendiness to gain credibility for its bands.

It is a potent mix that uses thriving alternative media as an avenue to make themselves available to a vast number of people: it runs a record label, a series of video documentaries, the *Resistance* magazine, a weekly electronic newsletter, and an Internet home page that promotes the bands, concerts, literature, and Internet connections to other racist contacts. All of these media help promote the image that Resistance is just another independent record company.

HEAVY HATE

A member of Detroit's Anti-Racist Action (ARA), a highly successful and militant group in the forefront of actions to stop white power groups, worries about the alarmingly slick exterior to Resistance Records. Mike (he fears using his real name is too dangerous), has seen Resistance magazine's articles shift in emphasis towards bands with a more heavy-metal style: the leather n' hair spray look is replacing the nazi punk pose in order to gain a tinge of legitimacy which would allow them to connect up with a wider audience of kids. Mike asserts that "(Resistance) is out looking for popular metal bands like Danzig and Pantera, who have said racist things, and then they write in their magazine about them - aligning themselves with these more influential people."

In the past, hate-rock music was delivered in the form of sixth generation cassette tapes and sketchy fanzines that offered up the punk/metal music of some low-fi, low talent bands. As well, image has always been a problem. The general - and accurate - impression that the white power movement was made up of angry, dysfunctional old white men was never something to brag about. But with *Resistance* magazine's proclaimed circulation of 13,000, and the label's co-ordination of almost every racist rock band in the States, not only

continued on page 12

HOW DOES TASTE WORK? HEARING WORKS. OTHER SENSES WORK BUT TASTE DOESN'T WORK. TASTE JUST HANGS OUT & HAS A GOOD TIME. TASTE HAS A REALLY GOOD TIME WITH REAL COCA-COLA. A BITING TASTE. A SHARP, SMOOTH TASTE. TASTE LIKES TO ENJOY ITSELF. TASTE IS A GOOD THING. THERE'S COCA-COLA. IT'S REAL COCA-TASTE. REASON YOU DRINK IT.



White noise

cont'd from page 11

change: "In the 90's there has been an emergence of young, articulate leaders who are out looking for other kids; whereas before there wasn't this youth-potency factor, it was mostly

KKK presidential candidate in the Republican primaries] David Duke: he took off his hood and put on a suit and tie," says Shulman. "In this way, he legitimized himself in the eyes of a lot of Americans."

For Burdi, teenagers who couldn't be bothered with a racist pamphlet or book, might be accessible through the music medium. And the move from owning a band's CD to attending its concert seems, on the surface, to be the same whether it's a Pearl Jam CD or one by Aryan

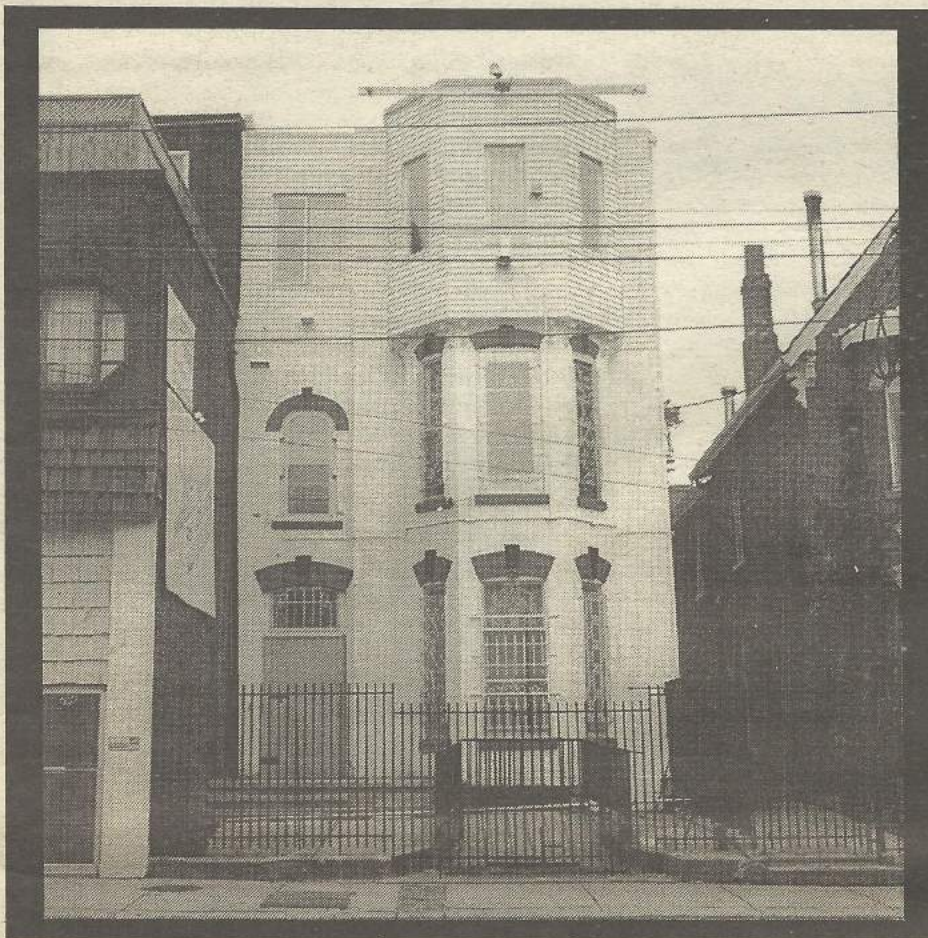


Photo by Phillip Smith

Ernst Zundel's headquarters and bunker in Toronto

older men doing the preaching." Shulman describes the changed face of racism as "the sugar-coated approach," where the attempt to draw in supporters hinges upon making the initial and surface propaganda more palatable for the general public.

This means using less offensive organization titles like 'The Heritage Front,' speaking on social issues like immigration and multiculturalism instead of genocide, and calling themselves 'nationalists' and 'populists.' "The father of the new approach is [1992's

Youth but for one exception: teenagers are not urged to go through racist rituals and pledges of allegiance when they see Pearl Jam.

The potential danger of racist rock has been sadly proven many times over, one example being the June 1993 beating of Sivaraman Virisathamby of Toronto; his attacker, Jason Hoolans, had just come from a rock concert put on by the Heritage Front, and Hoolans has subsequently credited the concert as his main "inspiration" for the assault.

CLEARING CUSTOMS

Groups like the Canadian Jewish Congress and Anti-Racist Action, along with law-enforcement agencies like the Metro Toronto Police, have tried to counter the white power movement by educating Canadian youth about the menacing foundations hidden within racist music. A member of Toronto's ARA says, "One of the most important things to do in arguing the merit of shutting these fuckers down is to not let them de-politicize the issue. It's not just about bands and music, it's about racism, homophobia, anti-semitism, and violence."

In Canada, Resistance Records' music -- when it sneaks through Canada Customs -- is mostly received by mail-order. But it also has been sniffed out in downtown Toronto stores where the CDs are sold under the counter. Toronto ARA speaks of their work combatting this illegal distribution: "We have had some victories, we just stay vigilant: keeping an eye on the city, following people around, and watching all the information sources." ARA's efforts have already resulted in the closure of a Queen Street store which sold White Power music. A good example of ARA's in-your-face approach was their December 1994 protest in front of a Yonge Street shoe store that distributed racist music. No doubt the effectiveness of their action was purposefully buoyed by the fact that the protest went off during the height of shopping season. ARA states that further checks on this store have revealed that they have stopped selling the CDs.

Over in Detroit, where the U.S. concern for freedom of speech reigns supreme, the fight against Resistance takes a different approach. The Detroit ARA appeals to the self-interest and business sense of record store owners who legally sell the material. ARA's actions have been met, for the most part, with success as store owners respond to public and consumer pressure. But the lack of "official" community and government support is discouraging for Detroit ARA.

"Not too many people get up in arms about it here, including our long-term activists and trade union people," says Mike, "I think that a lot of them have the attitude that 'aw a few knuckle-headed Nazis, that's not a problem.'" Mike also makes reference to national organizations like the ironically titled Liberty Lobby, whose magazine, *Spotlight* (circulation 250,000), recently gave Resistance Records a centrepiece article, and *Outlaw Biker*, a business which owns a group of tattoo and biker magazines running advertisements for Resistance Records. Mike's comment

continued on page 16

Featured NOTES

June 15: The "Subtext... Fashion Centre" is presenting their 2nd Annual Fashion Event celebrating this year's theme, "One Word of Silence." All proceeds benefiting The People With AIDS Foundation and The Canadian Cancer Society. Special guest appearances include drag artist, 'The Fabulous Jackae Baker'.

Where: The Design Exchange, Cocktails at 8:00 sharp!

For more information, call Subtext... at 416-351-1919.

June 17 to 19: The 18th annual Guelph Conference on Human Sexuality. North America's premier sexuality conference is focusing this year on 'Woman and Sexuality'. Keynote speakers, Interest Group Breakfasts, Book signings and a Movie Night are just a few of the events.

Where: Main registration area in the foyer of the Thornbrough Building, across from the University Centre.

For more information, contact Margaret Boyd, External Communications, at 519-824-4120 x3338.

June 22: The 1st Annual Canadian Cannabis Conference is starting up in London with seminars on the legal, scientific, and agricultural aspects of cannabis as well as displays of cannabis and hemp products.

Where: Main Auditorium Centennial Hall, London

Tickets are \$4 in advance and \$5 at the door, for information call 519-858-9872

June 22 & 23: Toronto's Anti-Racist Action is planning a conference to share skills, strategies and information, bringing together anti-racists from around Ontario and beyond. Speakers, workshops and live music.

Where: Downtown Toronto, with music at El Mocambo Saturday night

Tickets are \$7 advance and \$10 at the door, available at 'Rotate This' and 'She Said Boom' or by contacting ARA at 416-631-8835 or ara@wab.apc.org.



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noise

cont'd from page 12

is, "how much can you rely on a state apparatus that's, if not dominated by, at least inundated with this kind of racism?"

Buck Passing

But what can be said of Canada's law-enforcement bodies? Red tape and buck passing seem to be the order of the day. Beginning with the RCMP who, when asked about their efforts towards combatting racist music, replied that the question of its entry into the country is a matter for Canada Customs.

And concerning investigations into illegal distribution of the music, a member of the Metro Toronto Hate Crime Unit (he wished to remain anonymous) confessed to being unaware of any going on. Steven Strang of the Criminal Analysis Unit of the RCMP explains why they can crack-down on drug traffickers but not on the problem of racist music. "It's a similar method of research and investigation [as with drug laws], but since the possession of the racist material is not illegal, we would have to find a distributor in order to begin an investigation."

And from the Revenue Canada Customs side of things, Michel Cleroux, chief of media relations, maintains that hate propaganda does get seized at the border, but "we don't have an air-tight seal on the country." Cleroux adds that the task of controlling the input of racism is made more difficult when the racism is couched in vague and superficially innocent phrases, a trademark of racism's new face. Section 13 of our Canadian Human Rights Act stipulates that it is a discriminatory practice for a person to communicate hatred to another person who is identifiable on the basis of "a prohibited ground of discrimination." Therefore, a CD that speaks of "white nationalism,"

but does not target a specific group or section of society, would not qualify for prohibition.

"A lot of today's propaganda is well worded," says the member of Metro's Hate Crime Unit. "Today's racists don't directly advocate genocide; they're very careful." As for if Section 13 should be reworded to cover this stealth racism, the reply was grim: "They can always find a way to bypass the law; their propaganda does the job, and it is able to spread the seeds of discontent."

But the philosophy behind ARA is that activism on an individual and community level is just as vital as any legislation. A member of Toronto's ARA maintains, "there isn't the legal will [in Canada] to crack down on this thing." He argues key whitepower leaders like Toronto loudmouths Ernst Zundel and Wolfgang Droege were never convicted of hate crimes in Canada, and is evidence that Canadians cannot rely on their governments to do the job.

The rift between Toronto's ARA and Metro Police is well known. The police complain that ARA's aggressive brand of activism and their 'fuck the authority' stance effectively cuts ARA out of the process of legitimate anti-racism. The most publicized confrontation between the two is probably the protest a protest in November, 1992 when Metro officers and several mounted police were 'employed' to protect members of the Heritage Front from an angry group of anti-racists. ARA supporters left the protest with some billy club bruises that only crystallized their distrust of Metro Police methods and intentions.

Mike of Detroit ARA sees government legislation as a poor substitute for personal responsibility. He believes hate laws, rather than stopping known racists, just encourage public apathy and allows these groups to carry out their activities unhindered. He relates how his group are doing more than just chasing around neo-nazis: "We have a campaign that tries to promote inner-city prosperity by advocating to keep capital and work within the city."

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